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ABSTRACT

English or rhetoric and composition faculty must work to collapse disciplinary boundaries in their institutions. The challenge facing English departments is to collapse the "we-they" mentality, to develop productive partnerships with other departments, and to develop a healthy respect for other disciplines. At Yavapai College in Arizona, a survey examined the ways in which faculty in other departments were using writing as part of a writing across the curriculum program. The two disciplines selected were far removed from the humanities and English: gunsmithing and nursing. Sociology was chosen as a third discipline. Research consisted of classroom observation and student and faculty interviews and questionnaires. Results showed that much writing and thinking was going on in the classrooms but that it was being used to show learning, not to discover ideas or create new knowledge. Most all writing was transactional in its effort to complete tasks and not reflective, or as Donald Gray says, a "record of the mind in the act of knowing." Faculty expected a polished piece, not a trail of invention or thinking. Instructors were also vague about their rationales for their writing assignments. (Contains 4 tables of data, a table of recommendations for working with faculty in other disciplines, and 14 references.) (TB)

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Burrowing Under the Gates:

Becoming a Mole in Your Own Institution

(Review of research related to four instructors' use of writing and thinking across the curriculum in a two-year community college and methods of spreading techniques of the process approach to writing in non-English classes: gunsmithing, nursing, and sociology))

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Burrowing Under the Gates: Becoming a Mole in Your Own Institution

One of the biggest problems in faculty development at any institution is cultural lag, with contemporary developments of the last 20-25 years in discourse analysis and dialogic voices and the social construction of knowledge slow to catch on in disciplines other than composition and rhetoric and English. Unfortunately, WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) or WID (Writing in the Disciplines) became buzz-words for administrators, a phenomenon which was guaranteed to quell faculty enthusiasm. Workshops were held, but often, they became brag sessions in the "Dick and Jane" method (Look at me! See what I am doing!) rather than "How can I help you achieve your goals?" At the same time, student skills in writing (and thinking) diminished (probably speaking and listening, too). Grading or evaluating papers, which we do with abandon, became an overwhelming task for other faculty. I am reminded of a math professor who said, "How do I know what an A paper is? Do you in English have models of an outstanding paper to show to students?" Certainly, if the math professor does not know what an A grade is, how is the student going to know? Many conventions of the process approach to writing, which we take for granted in composition--models, criteria sheets, written assignments, audience and purpose analysis, and peer workshops--seem to be revelations for our colleagues in other disciplines.

Our biggest challenge in information-sharing sessions with colleagues is to quash our immediate reaction ("You're doing what in that class?!!) and turn the conversation into a teaching opportunity. For example, a well-meaning junior faculty was bragging over lunch about how he told his students in his history classes to use the Chicago-style manual for documentation. I bit my lip, remembering my first Cornell College professor in the 1960's who told me the same thing--and counted the spaces between my ellipses. I never did get it right. No wonder the student was

so confused! Carefully in the conversation, I worked in reference to the APA or MLA styles, documentation formats with which our freshmen composition students are more familiar.

I am proposing that as English or rhetoric and composition faculty, we must be as subterranean as moles--which is, I suppose, a form or subversion and immersion--in expanding our tunnels within our institutions. I chose the title for this article not long after Aldrich Ames, a major Russian spy, had been caught last year in Washington, D.C.; the analogy seemed appropriate, for we often seem to be working in at least two camps, maintaining allegiances to all and attempting to avoid overt conflicts. We need to break down the disciplinary boundaries and develop an information exchange, where information is freely exchanged, with no threatening implications. It doesn't help that we have the answers when no one is asking us to the dance, the conversations about writing in other disciplines. We do, however, have a lot to learn from each other, and it is up to us to initiate and create the opportunities for conversations. We must create the bridges that connect the disciplines and remove the barriers.

In this article, I am going to outline methods by which I attempted to collapse disciplinary boundaries during research on writing across the curriculum at Yavapai College (a rural community college in northern Arizona) in 1992 and 1993. After a brief overview of my methods of working with faculty from other disciplines, I will conclude with additional insights on a new style of leadership such interaction necessitates.

Over a twenty-five year-time span I have been at seven different public and private colleges, from a community college to a religious institution to a private university and now, Bradley University. All institutions have a "we-they" mentality: "Our English Department is being assaulted by "them"; they don't want to give us a raise;" the "Science Department gets all the

funding" are frequent litanies. I have heard all these comments at all the institutions where I've been. None of us would debate that barriers of disciplines, of faculty, and administration are entrenched. But I think our challenge is to collapse these boundaries without alienating the perpetrators. However, not only other disciplines become the "they"; we ourselves sometimes are forced into the role of "other." In the January 1996 issue of College English, Walvoord notes that if we are successful in setting up a WAC program, sometimes we English faculty even become the "they"--the enforcers of those rules for Writing Intensive courses (66).

Edward Said says much about the world of the "Other" in his classic book Orientalism (1978). I think some of his observations, especially about cultural domination, apply to our teaching about writing across the curriculum when we are working with colleagues in other disciplines. Said said there is a tendency to view the "undeveloped region" (those, for us, other than us--disciplines not so advanced in WAC) as an area to be "cultivated, harvested, and guarded" (p. 219). In other words, power becomes a key issue as the "we-they" mentality fosters notions of colonization. We in English have something to offer to these masses and our missionary zeal is inflamed. "We can save the world through writing. Writing holds the key to learning, and so on." In Bacon's words, "writing makes an exact [hu]man."

I would argue strongly that we need to put out those missionary fires. We need to learn techniques of assimilating ourselves into the institutional culture, free of turf bias. Several places where I've worked had real resentment of English Department faculty, by other faculty, and I have had to work hard to make friends in other disciplines. This is a problem, for English faculty do have knowledge and we do know how to teach others to use writing in process approaches. However, at one institution where I was employed, thanks to an iconoclastic and founding faculty

father's reputation, members of the science, biology, chemistry, business, and psychology departments wanted nothing to do with English faculty. To be aware of those stereotypes and preconceptions is the first awareness a person with WAC ideas must encounter.

Nevertheless, we can also use those differences to our advantage. The balance between a healthy territoriality and collaboration is essential for a program to work successfully, as Gottschalk writes in the Winter 1995 ADE Bulletin. She states that we should support individual efforts by disciplines and work to spread writing to learn concepts, not intricacies of grammar rules (1). WE become supportive and collaborative, not janitorial, the person cleaning up the grammar. At Cornell University, Gottschalk discusses the independence of many disciplines to set up their own writing programs, which has led to Writing in the Majors courses, as well as other disciplines taking responsibility for the teaching of freshman writing seminars.

Such respect for other disciplines was behind the creation of this research project. When I began to develop a network for this research in 1992, I cultivated my previous contacts. For classroom observations and intense interviews, I chose people with at least ten years teaching experience and with whom I had served on committees. In order to elicit commitment and cooperation, I chose some colleagues with whom I had common interests or negotiated reciprocal favors. Thus, my first point is to cultivate your previous associations when attempting to establish disciplinary conversations.

Included in my design of this research project in 1992 and 1993 was the idea that I would also select four individuals who did not have a strong background in English literature or composition. I also wanted to select disciplines at a two-year college, which were far removed from English and the humanities; two of those were gunsmithing and nursing. The third discipline

I selected was sociology, primarily because this instructor was Faculty Senate President and asked me to serve on a controversial Strategic Planning committee. (Notice what I mean about negotiating reciprocal favors). In return for these faculty allowing me into their classroom, lives, and journal thoughts, I offered to do anything that would be of help to them after the research was complete. Two of the faculty and I discussed possible team-teaching approaches; I also refined their writing assignments and criteria sheets.

In my initial contact with these four faculty, I wanted to be open-ended with no definition of thinking and writing activities, other than their interpretation. Eventually I wanted each instructor to define writing for me, so I said I was only interested in "what they were doing with writing," deliberately being vague. I was careful to avoid any learned jargon that might be intimidating. I wanted to gather many observations over an extended period of time, what Geertz calls the "thick description" of ethnography.

From the beginning, I had anticipated that it would be possible to find students in each class who had been former students of mine; I would ask them to keep journals and provide the triangulation which Stephen North charges that most ethnographies avoid: "the students' perspective. . .is neither represented nor considered" (North 298). That plan developed well; I discovered four students in the sociology class; eight in nursing, but none in gun smithing. Thus, I asked the person next to me at the second gun smithing class to complete the questionnaire and also interviewed another gun smithing student while having the oil changed in my car.

For additional triangulation, I asked each instructor to present initially to me a syllabus of course requirements and to maintain throughout the semester a journal record of what he or she thought was occurring with writing and thinking activities in the classroom, as well as to complete

a questionnaire. My questionnaire was designed to elicit answers to these research questions:

(1) "What types of writing and thinking activities are being required and executed in specific content-area courses other than composition at a two-year institution?"

(2) "What rationale and theory undergird the instructors' assignments?

(3) "How metacognitively aware of his or her theory is each instructor?"

(4) Finally, "Is the instructor using writing to enhance learning or teaching writing in the conventions of the discipline or both?

After an initial response from the sociology instructor, when I realized he was giving me objectives, but not rationale, I modified my questionnaire. This variety of additional information helped me to answer my second and third research questions about instructor rationale, philosophy, and metacognitive awarenesses.

When all classroom observations had been completed, I then interviewed the instructors and students for information, such as their definitions of writing and their rationale for their writing activities. They also completed a lengthy questionnaire. It was extremely important to word the questions carefully so that all invention, prewriting, note taking, listing, thinking-before-writing, drafting, revising, and editing activities were considered.

In my overall design of this project, I attempted to follow a systematic means of gathering empirical data, as much as was possible. For example, I originally intended, in the best scientific tradition, to visit each class twelve times. However, in the context of assignments and teaching demands, the final visits differed in each class: twelve in sociology, eight in nursing (it was a once a week seminar), and five in gunsmithing. Due to the narrative nature of responses in the questionnaires, it was impossible to complete a statistical analysis of comparison of different

disciplines. Numerical replies are tabulated on Tables 1-4.. Note that little, if any, attention is given to invention activities or models of papers.

In my design of this research project, I was particularly careful not to impose my knowledge of the teaching of composition upon the subjects; no longer does the subject-object distinction apply in my research methods. Both become combined, particularly when the self-consciousness of the age often allows me to see myself as object in a subjective situation, surveying others both as subjects and objects. I had no expectations about what I would discover and I did not expect some kernel of truth to be out there, waiting to be found. Instead, I have come to believe in the social constructionist approach, defined by Martha Townsend: "Reality is not an absolute . . . but is rather a construction made by individual observers and participants, each of whom has something different at stake in the program and how it is evaluated" (Townsend 46-7).

When one combines the ethnographer's observation of cultures with the social construction idea of knowledge-making, a complex ethnography emerges, which is collaborative both between and among all the participants and observers of cultures.

I use the term "culture" here in its broadest contexts, suggesting there are many cultures, from the culture of the individual classrooms to a general culture. Van Maanen defines culture as the "knowledge members ("natives") are thought to more or less share" (3). In other words, a "culture is expressed (or constituted) only by the actions and words of its members and must be interpreted by, not given to, a field worker" (3). Geertz defines culture as a system of "shared meanings" (Interpretation of Cultures). Culture, then, is not something visible which is only inscribed, although it may have material components, but it "is made visible only through its

representation" (Van Maanen 3).

Working with all the data I collected from my ethnographic observations and questionnaires, both from students and faculty, as well as interviews, I was able to conclude that much writing and thinking was going on in the classrooms, but it was being used primarily to show learning, not to discover ideas and create new knowledge. Tables 1-4 reflect the results of my information, illustrating how writing and thinking are used in the different courses. It is evident that areas of exploration and expressive writing could be increased. Most all writing was transactional (in Britton et al's definition of that term) in its effort to complete tasks and reflect learning, but not reflective or, as Gray says, a "record of the mind in the act of knowing." All faculty expected more polished pieces, not a trail of thinking or invention. In this research project, I found much writing being executed by students to show mastery of learning, but very little writing being performed to discover ideas and express metacognition. Instructors can develop both strategies; the combination may begin to address literacy crises, discussion about which surfaces regularly. By helping students become more metacognitively aware of their thinking and writing processes, instructors can aid students in preparation for the coming millennium by helping them develop critical thinking skills.

Instructors also need to develop a rationale for their writing assignments. Most instructors were aware of their definitions of writing as critical thinking, but had not formulated sequencing of assignments. They were not using writing to learn and explore or teaching conventions of their disciplines; they primarily used writing to show learning, expecting polished pieces without teaching or modeling writing strategies. The gunsmithing professor showed a copy of his own notebook developed over twenty years--he passed it around the first day of class.

when students were not quite aware of its significance or the expectation that they, too should produce such a notebook. The sociology professor read aloud an effective model paper of analysis of an essay on "The Sociological Imagination," but did not provide an overhead or copy to the students. Nor did he specifically mention the criteria upon which he graded that paper. He did, however, provide a criteria sheet for grading to students before their papers were submitted, the only professor (of the four observed) who did so.

Had I pointed out to all the faculty my observations of their teaching of writing and thinking (and omissions of both), I would probably have been considered a meddler. However, when asked, I was willing to offer gentle suggestions. I also allowed all the faculty to read my objective analysis of their classroom and my final conclusions and recommendations. To develop the network to create the environment where faulty are more receptive to suggestions about criteria sheets, for example, takes creativity and seizing of opportunities. I have developed a list of some of the techniques which I have found successful in working with faculty from other disciplines. They include the seven points in Table 5.

To be able to relate to our colleagues beyond the English, composition, Humanities, or communication departments requires a new form of leadership, one that Rosener calls "interactive," rather than "command and control." Much research in leadership, from James McGregor Burns in 1978 to Margaret Wheatley (1992) discusses relationships which must be developed. As English faculty, we need to cultivate our associations without trying to control or dominate them. Wheatley states that these leaders "evoke the potential from people that is already there" (1992). Such is our challenge as faculty members of the liberal arts and humanities. Such development cannot but serve us all as we fumble together on this spaceship earth, hoping

to witness the next century: writing and thinking will be with us always, and we might as well become better at those tasks, whether it be in biology, psychology, or humanities. Our very survival as a species may well depend upon our ability to reason, think, and solve problems in our global environment. Such is our challenge as instructors as we enable our colleagues to develop those skills in their students. Our tunnels need not be evident--but their impact is the foundation of learning in all disciplines.

TABLE 1
Instructor Questionnaire Composite (item 31)

"Which (and how much) of these writing activities do students do in your class?"

	Every class	Monthly	Once or twice a semester	Never
copying				3
taking notes	4			
writing from dictation				2
writing on the board	1		2	1
filling in the blanks				3
answering questions			1	
making lists or outlines	1		2	2
labeling, making charts			2	1
summarizing	1		1	
paraphrasing				
defining	4			
personal experience, reactions, feelings		1	1	
exposition (essays to inform)		1	1	
persuasion, arguments		1		
critiques, evaluations		1	1	
applications	1	1	1	
case studies		1	1	
dramatic works, fiction, poetry				3
interactive learning log				1
brainstorming, other prewriting		1		
inventing				
other (please specify)				

TABLE 2
Instructor Questionnaire Composite (item 32)

"How much class time do you usually spend on each of these activities?"

	Every class	Monthly	Once or twice a semester	Never
in-class writing		1		2
discussion, analysis of models of writing				2
grammar and mechanics				3
organization and logic				4
prewriting (inventing, brainstorming, listing)		1		4
evaluation of other students' writing				4
editing, revising, proofreading				4
format topics (margins, headings, etc.)				4
discussing errors to avoid, such as usage				4

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TABLE 3
All-Student Questionnaire Composite (item 21)

"What writing activities did you do in the classes I observed? Which (and how much) of these did you engage in?"

	Every class	Monthly	Once or twice a semester	Never
copying	4		3	4
taking notes	12		2	
writing from dictation	2		1	7
writing on the board	2		4	2
filling in the blanks			2	5
answering questions	7		5	1
making lists or outlines	4		6	3
labeling, making charts	1		6	2
summarizing	5	2	5	2
paraphrasing	4		5	2
defining	4	2	5	2
personal experience, reactions, feelings	8		3	2
exposition (essays to inform)	4		3	2
persuasion, arguments	3	2	4	1
critiques, evaluations	4	2	4	1
applications			3	5
case studies	2		6	3
dramatic works, fiction, poetry			1	7
interactive learning log	2		1	7
brainstorming, other prewriting		2	6	3
inventing			3	4
other (please specify)				

TABLE 4
Nursing Student Questionnaire Composite (item 21)

"What writing activities did you do in the classes I observed? Which (and how much) of these did you engage in?"

	Every class	Monthly	Once or twice a semester	Never
copying	1		3	2
taking notes	5		2	1
writing from dictation			1	5
writing on the board			4	2
filling in the blanks			2	3
answering questions	1		5	1
making lists or outlines			6	1
labeling, making charts			6	1
summarizing	1		5	1
paraphrasing			5	2
defining			5	2
personal experience, reactions, feelings	2		3	2
exposition (essays to inform)		1	3	2
persuasion, arguments	1		4	1
critiques, evaluations	2		4	1
applications	1		3	3
case studies			6	1
dramatic works, fiction, poetry			1	6
interactive learning log			1	5
brainstorming, other prewriting			6	1
inventing			3	
other (please specify)	1			3

Table 5

"BURROWING UNDER THE GATES: BECOMING A MOLE IN YOUR OWN INSTITUTION" or HOW TO AVOID "OTHERING" ("US" VS. "THEM")

1. Always be available for discussions (lunch time, coffee breaks, in the corridors, at the library).
2. Ask questions about other disciplines: be curious and listen. The best ideas often come from others.
3. Avoid factions and personalities and alignments ("us" vs. "them" mentality) (See beyond turfs, patriarchy, administration).
4. Be willing to expand beyond your job description and offer services with no remuneration (prepare a workshop, help someone develop an assignment, even offer to evaluate papers).
5. Cultivate your contacts: Network and create a web of associations throughout the institution.
6. Develop a vision of your own goals within the institution. Be metacognitively aware: what and why are you there? What do you hope to achieve? Write a private journal or unsent letters exploring these issues.
7. Become an interactive leader (Rosener, 1995), not one who commands and controls.

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